



Amira Mattar <amattar@palestinelegalsupport.org>

(no subject)

Amira Mattar <amattar@palestinelegal.org>

Mon, Nov 9, 2020 at 10:14 AM

To: Peter Giano Poulos <pmp17@case.edu>, Renee O'Connor <rxo62@case.edu>

Hi Peter,

Thank you for your response and your explanations.

It looks like we agree on the following: Case Western was an organizer of the 2020 Social Justice Teach-In, Case Western had some role in accepting and rejecting proposals for the event, and Case Western believed workshops on Palestine required “balancing” with an opposing point of view.

We also agree that Mark Weber and Jewish Voice for Peace Cleveland (JVP) submitted a proposal for their workshop “Antisemitism, Human Rights, and the Struggle for Justice for Palestine,” prior to the January 6 deadline and that the workshop appeared on the Teach-In program on Case Western’s website. The JVP workshop, as described in its proposal, was to be about how Israel lobby groups “weaponize” allegations of antisemitism to silence speech critical of Israel’s human rights abuses, including by passing legislation targeting boycotts for Palestinian rights.

We agree that the JVP workshop was dropped from the Teach-In’s program and a workshop by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) appeared, seemingly in its place. The ADL did not submit a workshop proposal prior to the deadline and Case Western event organizers may have reached out to the ADL to present an opposing viewpoint as another workshop on Palestine had also been submitted to the Teach-In.

You do not dispute that the Teach-In had more than one workshop on other topics. For example, the topics of climate change, housing justice and immigration each had two workshops and there were several workshops on the issue of racial justice.

As you know, universities are places where people are encouraged to learn, express their viewpoints and engage with the world around them. Viewpoint-based restrictions that exclude certain views from being expressed hinder intellectual discussions and run afoul of principles of free speech and academic freedom. Such restrictions [also violate](#) Case Western’s own Policy on Freedom of Expression / Expressive Activities, which guarantees “the fullest possible right to hold and express opinions, to speak and write, to listen, challenge, inquire and learn.” The Policy also states that, “it is not the proper role of the University to suppress those ideas some may find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive.”

Case Western’s judgment that there needed to be “balance” on the issue of Palestinian human rights at the Social Justice Teach-in violated its own policies and resulted in the ejection of Mark and JVP’s workshop from the program, which organizers of the Teach-in, including Case Western, replaced with a perspective more sympathetic to Israel – a state notorious for violating Palestinian human rights and international law. Mark and JVP’s workshop was exchanged for a workshop by the ADL, a staunch pro-Israel group that has been [widely criticized](#) for undermining justice movements, including the movement for Palestinian rights. In the case of the latter, the ADL has advanced a strategy to expand the definition of antisemitism to include criticism of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians in attempt to chill speech supporting Palestinian rights – exactly what Mark had planned to discuss in his workshop.

Case Western’s “balancing” carries particular weight when viewed in the context of [ongoing efforts](#) to censor those who support Palestinian rights on U.S. college campuses. Groups aiming to suppress support for Palestinian human rights frequently demand “balance,” “objectivity” or a “diversity of perspectives” in university contexts as a way to limit programming on Palestine and ensure more pro-Israel programming, similar to that offered by the ADL.

I also raise concerns over a lack of clarity as to why Mark’s workshop specifically was cast aside. Of course, neither workshop on Palestine should have been ruled out, but it does not seem to be a coincidence that Mark’s workshop, which discussed the campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) for Palestinian rights as a way to work towards Palestinian freedom, was the one ultimately cut. The ADL and other pro-Israel groups have come out strongly against BDS, and have aggressively targeted any programming or activity related to BDS on campuses.

Moreover, it is Mark’s understanding that no other workshop at the Teach-In was rejected or removed because there were “too many” on a single topic or for any other reason – a fact which Case Western has been unable to confirm or deny. By allowing more than one workshop on the issues of climate change, housing justice, immigration and racial justice at the Teach-In, Case Western gave workshop participants the *choice* on how to critically engage on these issues, in a way that

Case Western determined was not acceptable when it came to Palestine. Needless to say, no other issue was deemed to need a “balancing” viewpoint, nor should it have been. It would be unconscionable if an event on social justice was forced to provide an anti-Black, anti-immigrant, or climate-denying viewpoint for “balance.” It is shameful that the issue of whether Palestinians should have human rights is deemed to be a topic of controversy and thus be singled out for special treatment.

Mark has dedicated the better majority of his 74 years to advocating for human rights and social justice causes around the world. As a retired librarian and Jewish man, he feels it particularly important to continue engaging the broader Cleveland community about Palestinian freedom. He requests a written apology to him for being prevented from doing so at the February 2020 Social Justice Teach-In.

Mark also fears that Case Western will repeat its harmful actions at future Social Justice Teach-Ins. For this reason, he would like an assurance from Case Western that it will not apply this “balancing” treatment to matters concerning Palestine at prospective Teach-Ins or any other events where there is an opportunity to explore and discuss issues relating to Palestine. If Case Western hosts the 2021 Social Justice Teach-In, he requests that programming on Palestine by Jewish Voice for Peace Cleveland be allowed at the event, should workshops be proposed.

Please let me know by November 16 if Case Western agrees to Mark’s requests.

Sincerely,
Amira

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